



RHODE ISLAND FED

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FOUR GUILTY IN DRUG DEALER ROBBERY PLOT

After discussing the plot with an undercover ATF agent who was posing as a drug courier, **Souvanh Keosouvanh** assembled a crew to rip off drug dealers.

The agent made a series of Ecstasy purchases from Keosouvanh and then broached the idea of ripping off his suppliers who, he said, trafficked in cocaine. Keosouvanh said he



A shotgun seized from four who planned to rob drug dealers.

could put together a reliable crew. Keosouvanh and three oth-

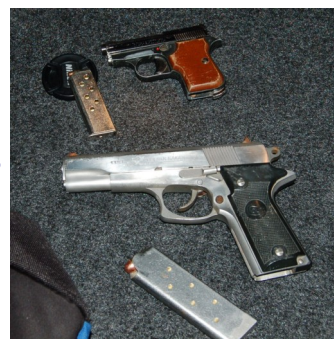
ers met with the agent and discussed the planned robbery — how they would

quickly overpower the drug dealers, using firepower if necessary, and take their merchandise. However, the drug dealers didn't exist and the men were headed into an ATF sting. When they arrived at a pre-arranged rendezvous area, a team of agents surrounded the vehicle and arrested



Keosouvanh and his codefendants: **Nheat Nhim**, **Vixay Phommarath**, and **Khek Choum-**

malaithong. Agents seized a shotgun and two pistols. Nhim, Phommarath, and Choum-malaithong pleaded guilty to several charges, and a jury convicted Keosouvanh of drug-trafficking and robbery conspiracies as well as firearms and



Handguns and ammo clips that were to be used in the robbery.

drug trafficking offenses. Not long before embarking on this scheme, Keosouvanh had been released from state prison after serving a sentence for a home invasion. Assistant U.S. Attorney Peter F. Neronha.

FEDERAL DRUG AND GUN CASES

Five are sentenced in cocaine smuggling

Adolfo Verdugo and **Omar Altamarino-Nunez** are each serving 12 and 1/2 years in federal prison for spearheading an attempt to smuggle 29 kilograms of cocaine from California to Rhode Island. DEA agents and Massachusetts State Troopers seized the cocaine after it was transferred from Verdugo's semi to a Jeep Cherokee at a rest area off I-91 north of Springfield. In an investigation known as "Rhode Trip," DEA agents had monitored Altamarino-Nunez and Verdugo discussing the delivery during cell phone conversations. Verdugo told Altamarino-Nunez to meet him where "the Simpsons live," a veiled reference to the fictional "Springfield," home of the cartoon characters, the Simpsons. Altamarino Nunez recruited two men to accompany him from Providence to Springfield to pick up the drugs. They are also serving federal prison terms, **Rafael Fernandez-Roque** 120 months, and **Idelfonso Betancourt-Rodriguez** 51 months. Also caught in the Rhode Trip net was **Juan Manuel Casillas**, who came to Rhode Island from California in December 2006 to pick up \$126,000 in cash proceeds from prior drug shipments. Rhode Island State Police seized the cash and arrested Casillas, who is serving four years in federal prison. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Mary E. Rogers.*



Adolfo Verdugo's truck, which transported produce — and 29 kilograms of cocaine

Two prior drug convictions make a cocaine trafficker a career offender

Raymond Texeira made what appeared to be a drug sale in the parking lot of a retail store on Branch Avenue in Providence. Providence detectives observed the deal and, when they approached Texeira, he fled, tossing away a plastic bag. One detective caught up to Texeira and detained him, while the other retrieved the bag, which contained 96 grams of cocaine — about three ounces. Texeira pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court to drug trafficking. Because he had been convicted twice before in Newport County Superior Court of drug trafficking, this third conviction made him a career offender under federal law and subject to an enhanced sentence. He's serving 151 months. *Assistant U.S. Attorneys Gerard B. Sullivan and Stephen G. Dambruch*



FEDERAL DRUG AND GUN CASES

Ten years for heroin and a gun

Robert Cruz, who had two prior drug-trafficking convictions, was using his apartment on Benefit Street, Pawtucket as a base for a heroin business. Pawtucket Police executed a search warrant and seized several bags of heroin, a loaded .380 caliber pistol, and several boxes and magazines of ammunition, including hollow-point rounds. They also seized a "Second Chance" bullet proof vest. After Cruz pleaded guilty to drug trafficking and firearms offenses, a federal judge sentenced him to ten years in prison. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Zechariah Chafee.*



Pharmacist sold pharmaceuticals to a street dealer and defrauded health insurers

Carmine DeTomas was a co-owner of Prime Drug on Cranston Street, Providence. He sold controlled drugs such as hydrocodone to **Louis Romanelli**, and bought prescription drugs from Romanelli, primarily expensive drugs used in the treatment of HIV/AIDs. DeTomas also paid cash for written prescriptions that he did not dispense but for which he received reimbursement from insurance carriers. An examination of Prime Drug's inventory determined that the pharmacy regularly billed carriers for more drugs than it had in its inventory. The pharmacy submitted fraudulent claims totaling \$398,600 to Medicaid, Medicare, and other insurance carriers. DeTomas pleaded guilty to health care fraud, misbranding drugs, and distributing controlled substances. Romanelli, 81, pleaded guilty to a dozen charges in connection with the illegal sale of prescription drugs and controlled substances. Another defendant, **Paul Vittorio**, admitted that, as a North Providence Police officer, he warned Romanelli that he was under investigation. As a result, Romanelli moved the base of his operation. Vittorio pleaded guilty to misprision of a felony and other charges, and resigned from the police department. Both DeTomas and Romanelli are subject to forfeiture of assets, including the real estate on which Prime Drug is located and Romanelli's home. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Adi Goldstein.*



\$220,000 pickup results in 30 months in prison

Charlie Vu drove from Jersey City to South Kingstown to pick up \$220,000 in drug money. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents were tracking his movements and, after he picked up a duffel bag containing the cash, Rhode Island State Police stopped his SUV and seized the bag. A drug dog detected the presence of drugs on the money and the bag. Vu told agents that he was to be paid \$1,000 for the pickup. He pleaded guilty to money laundering and was sentenced to 30 months in prison. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Mary E. Rogers*



CRIMINAL DOCKET SHEET

Sex offender moves to Rhode Island, fails to register, goes to prison

In the first application in Rhode Island of a 2006 federal law, **Michael DiTomaso** was sentenced to 30 months in prison after he moved from Milford, Massachusetts to Woonsocket and failed to register as a sex offender. DiTomaso was convicted in 1995 in Massachusetts of sex offenses involving minors under 16 and 14. In 2007, he moved to Woonsocket, and under the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA), was required to register in his new state of residence. After being advised to do so by a Woonsocket Police officer, DiTomaso failed to register and was arrested. A subsequent investigation by the U.S. Marshals Service resulted in the first SORNA violation charged in Rhode Island. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Milind M. Shah.*



Travel agent bilked airlines, Amtrak in bogus refund scheme

Frank Serio owned and operated Travel Concepts, Inc. and over the course of three years executed a ticket refund scheme that fraudulently netted him \$571,000 from eight airlines and Amtrak. Serio manipulated the ticket purchasing system to buy tickets at deep discounts, often using voucher numbers reserved for travel industry employees and their relatives. He bought the tickets in either fictitious names or in the names of real people who had no travel plans, and used either his corporate or personal credit cards. He then arranged to get refunds for the tickets at full price. A federal judge sentenced Serio to 15 months in prison plus another year in community confinement. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Lee H. Vilker.*



Coventry woman aided Nigerian fraud scheme

Nancy Alexander produced fraudulent checks on her home computer and forwarded checks sent to her in bulk from Nigeria. The checks were part of a Nigerian-based fraud scheme in which targets are sent checks far in excess of an amount asked for or expected and are asked to wire the excess to offshore accounts. Unwary targets were defrauded of the amount they wired back. Victims included people answering ads for work-at-home jobs, others advertising items for sale in classified ads, and others who had posted resumes on line. Alexander admitted producing \$1.6 million in bogus checks that she shipped to victims throughout the U.S. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Lee H. Vilker.*



CRIMINAL DOCKET SHEET

DMV clerk produced fraudulent licenses

Dolores Rodriguez LaFlamme processed drivers' licenses at the RI Division of Motor Vehicles in Pawtucket. She used her position to produce fraudulent licenses, which she sold for as much as \$2,700



to drivers who, for various reasons, could not get legitimate licenses. Some needed licenses in aliases to conceal their identities, some could not pass the written test, and others were illegal immigrants. An investigation by Rhode Island State Police, assisted by the DMV Enforcement unit, uncovered the scheme. At LaFlamme's trial in U.S. District Court, an informant testified that he bought a fraudulent license while posing as a drug dealer who needed an alias.



LaFlamme was convicted of conspiracy to produce fraudulent identity documents and aggravated identity theft, which is identity theft used to commit another felony. *Assistant U.S. Attorneys Richard W. Rose, Richard Myrus, and Sandra R. Hebert.*

Hospital guard & store clerks guilty in identity theft

Roberto Valerio assisted **Michael Bermudez** in opening accounts at RadioShack in the names of Rhode Island Hospital patients. Bermudez was a contract security guard at the hospital and used that position to obtain patients' identity information. With the help of Valerio and other clerks at a RadioShack store, Bermudez obtained cell phones and RadioShack charge accounts. Bermudez sold the phones as pre-paid accounts. He pleaded guilty to credit card fraud and identity theft. A jury convicted Valerio of conspiracy to commit credit card fraud and identity theft. Two other RadioShack clerks also admitted helping Bermudez open accounts. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Adi Goldstein.*



Title company president in \$1.3 million fraud

Angela Raposa owned **Title America Closing Services**, a company that facilitated real estate sales.



Proceeds of sales went into her company's escrow account and were supposed to be used to pay off existing mortgages and other liabilities. However, Raposa wrote checks and withdrew funds from the escrow account to pay for such personal expenses as her utility and personal mortgage bills, hair salon fees, a car, clothing, and personal trips. She pleaded guilty to wire fraud. The title insurance company suffered \$1.3 million in losses. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Andrew J. Reich.*

CIVIL DOCKET SHEET

Fugitive doctor's forfeited assets fetch millions

Tarek Wehbe, a physician who practiced in Rhode Island, is charged with health care fraud, illegal drug distribution, and other offenses. He is believed to be in Lebanon. In his absence, the U.S. Attorney's Office has pursued the forfeiture of assets he left behind, including bank accounts and real estate worth millions of dollars, all alleged to be the proceeds of health care fraud. Among the assets forfeited so far is a shorefront home in Jamestown, which the government sold on the open market



This waterfront home was forfeited from a fugitive physician charged with health care fraud and other offenses

for about \$3.2 million. A bank account and a 401(k) fund worth \$209,000 were also forfeited. A federal indictment accuses Wehbe of submitting false claims to insurance carriers for drug infusion therapies and other patient care. It also alleges that he inflated the level and type of care that he provided. It alleges that he submitted claims that would have resulted in work days of more than 24 hours. A warrant has been issued for his arrest. *Assistant U.S. Attorneys Adi Goldstein and Milind Shah.*



Tarek Wehbe, believed to be in Lebanon

\$95,000 payment settles physician's overbilling issue

Joseph DiSanto is a Rhode Island physician who performed procedures on facet joints, which are small joints in the spine. Medicare and Medicaid paid him for some of the procedures, which he



billed as "facet joint injections." However, a review by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services concluded that Dr. DiSanto was actually performing a different sort of procedure, known as "trigger point injections," which are less involved than the facet point injections and are reimbursed at a lower rate by Medicare and Medicaid. Negotiations

produced a \$95,000 payment by Dr. DiSanto to reimburse the Medicare and Medicaid programs. *Assistant U.S. Attorney Milind M. Shah and Assistant Rhode Island Attorney General Cindy Soccio.*



PARTNERS AT WORK

National Crime Victims Rights Week



On Wednesday, April 29, as part of National Crime Victims Rights Week, the Rhode Island Crime Victims Service Providers Steering Committee will hold its annual victims ceremony in Victims Grove in Memorial Park on South Main Street (opposite Providence County Superior Court). Leaders and activists in the victims rights movement will be honored and a traditional planting ceremony will take place to commemorate victims of crime in Rhode Island. *Contact Victim Assistance Coordinator Gale E. James at 401-709-5000,*

gale.james@usdoj.gov.

Foundation announces Fund for a Healthy Rhode Island

In 2007, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island reached an agreement with U.S. Attorney Robert



RI Foundation President Neil Steinberg announcing the Fund for a Healthy Rhode Island

Clark Corrente that deferred prosecution in exchange for ethical reforms and a \$20 million payment to the Rhode Island Foundation, to be used to improve health care availability. The Rhode Island Foundation is using that \$20 million to establish a permanent fund devoted to enhancing primary health care for Rhode Islanders. Foundation President Neil Steinberg said the Fund for a Healthy Rhode Island will generate about \$800,000 in its first year. The proceeds will be used to develop new approaches and partnerships to make primary care services more accessible to working families, create access to affordable medications, and develop education and outreach. Proceeds will also be used to establish loan forgiveness programs for doctors and other medi-

cal professionals who commit to primary care. Currently, only two percent of graduating medical students plan to practice primary care.

“Establishing a permanent fund was in the best interest of Rhode Islanders, who will benefit from the foundation’s investment policies, its stability, and its judicious approach to grant making,” U.S. Attorney Corrente said.

The agreement with Blue Cross Blue Shield resulted from an investigation into its relationships with certain Rhode Island legislators.



(Left to right) RI Foundation Chairman David Hirsch, RI Lt. Governor Elizabeth Roberts, U.S. Attorney Robert Clark Corrente, Foundation President Neil Steinberg.

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